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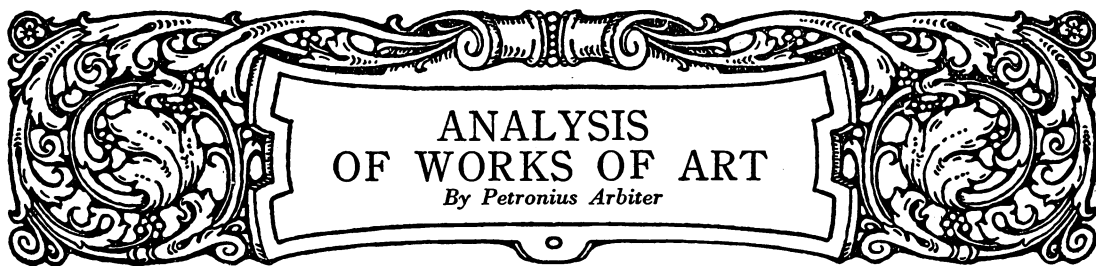
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A GREAT WORK OF ART THE TRIUMPH OF SILENUS BY RUBENS

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THIS month we begin our promenade among the art works of the world by choosing a comic subject. We do so because we are partisans of the idea that the comic—when clean and fine—is a distinctly lifting force, because it takes us away from the commonplace drudgery of the daily grind.

The truly comic is only less sublime than the tragic because the latter lifts us farther away from the earth-earthly.

This work of Rubens is one of the great gems of the National Gallery of London and one of the finest creations of Rubens and, no doubt, painted entirely by his own hand, unlike many of his larger decorations. And the work oozes with the unctuous joy he must have felt in telling this story in paint.

The work bears evidence on its face that here Rubens deliberately chose a subject—contrary to the notion of some ridiculous faddists of to-day, who, while hating preaching, vociferously preach the idiotic theory that a work of art should have neither subject nor idea!

The work is great because:

First: Having chosen a Subject, and a fine one, one of universal significance and comprehensibility—the delicious story of the triumph of the god of wine—he *conceived* that subject on as high a plane as ever has been done by any man who handled the subject. There is nothing coarse in spirit or act in the picture. It is pure and innocent revelry. Silenus is not beastly drunk, he is only jolly and gay, only “three sheets in the wind” as the sailors say. Nor is any of his band of joy-makers so sunk in wine as to be unfit to join in the revelry. The whole group radiates sane and serene “joy unconfined”!

Second: The Composition is so full of rhythmic, melodious lines that it is full of beauty, and the disposition of all of the figures, their members and heads, is such that the attention is wholly centered on the jolly face of old Silenus. Moreover, Rubens here did not make a slavish copy of any of his models. He idealized their forms, but so modestly that he invested the whole work with a fine style as if a Greek had painted it.

Third: The Expression of the faces of every fig-

ure is profoundly true, but, above all, the face and entire body of Silenus. His face radiates the intense, fat joy of living. It is the Philosophy of Pleasure personified. And this is reinforced by the expression of the rollicking rolls of fat on his arms and torso.

This masterly adequacy of expression Rubens never surpassed in any other of his pictures.

Fourth: As to Drawing. While Rubens’ drawing of the figures in some of his works is often careless and sometimes bad, here it is fine, as true yet large as if the impeccable Velasquez had drawn the figures. The drawing and movement are so true that we do not think of the drawing. Thus it should be. Hence, the figures live and have motion.

Fifth: Both as to Color-scheme and fat, juicy richness of tones, its color harks back to Giorgione and Titian more than do most of Rubens’ other pictures. In fact, in this respect, it stands out almost alone among his works.

Sixth: Finally its Technique, or brushwork, is of that impersonal yet individual kind which, while we feel it is by Rubens, we are not so sure of it as we are with most of his other works. It is not too “rubensy” as some of his Louvre pictures. We do not at first think of the “technique” until we are compelled to laughter by the gripping life and movement and comedy so marvelously expressed and by the splendor of color. Then only, when we have been truly emotioned, and began to be intellectually curious, do we go up to the picture to examine the methods of craftsmanship of the painter. And so logically it should be.

The result is, a perfectly harmonious unit, a moving picture not only of life, but of ideal life, lifting us into the realm of poetry and joy, a delight for all time. And the more we look at it the more overwhelming and compelling becomes the expression of life, an expression that is truly individual but unmarred, hence unweakened, by any silly cat’s-paw marks of a mountebank searching for petty self-advertisement in an exasperating song-and-dance display of “individualism” in craftsmanship.

That is why it is great.

A CLEVER WORK OF ART THE VOYAGE TO CYTHERA BY WATTEAU

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BELIEVING that the public would be pleased to have a fine example of a work of Art belonging to the class Art for Art’s Sake exhibited, Watteau’s “Embarkation for Cythera” has been chosen; painted in 1714, it is reproduced on page 200.

Gautier said: “Art for Art’s sake means, for

its adepts: the pursuit of pure beauty without any other preoccupation.”

That is—the slenderest kind of an idea, or no idea at all; no purpose, as Lessing suggests, of any kind; no sentiment or thought—simply beauty of composition and of craftsmanship. Well, in Watteau’s

